

---

## Retrospective Theses and Dissertations

---

1985

### The Content of Children's Toy and Food Commercials: Another Look.

Dennis G. Ray  
*University of Central Florida*



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rtd>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

#### STARS Citation

Ray, Dennis G., "The Content of Children's Toy and Food Commercials: Another Look." (1985).  
*Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 4748.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rtd/4748>



Showcase of Text, Archives, Research & Scholarship

STARS

THE CONTENT OF CHILDREN'S TOY AND  
FOOD COMMERCIALS: ANOTHER LOOK

BY

DENNIS GRANVILLE RAY  
B. A., University of Missouri at Kansas City, 1972

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree in Communication  
in the Graduate Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences  
University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term  
1985



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW . . . . .	1
TELEVISION AS AN ADVERTISING MEDIUM . . . . .	4
THE BUSINESS OF ADVERTISING . . . . .	9
GROUPS REGULATING CHILDREN'S ADVERTISING . . . . .	13
The Federal Communications Commission . . . . .	13
The Federal Trade Commission . . . . .	14
The 1978 Federal Trade Commission Hearings . . . . .	14
Action for Children's Television . . . . .	18
The Center for Science in the Public Interest . . . . .	21
The National Association of Broadcasters . . . . .	21
Council of Better Business Bureaus . . . . .	24
PRIOR RESEARCH . . . . .	27
Child Development Studies . . . . .	27
Parental Attitudes Towards Commercials . . . . .	29
Television Advertising's Effect on	
Attitudes and Socialization . . . . .	31
Product Requests . . . . .	32
Content Analysis . . . . .	37
A New and Alarming Trend . . . . .	39
THE ATKIN-HEALD STUDY . . . . .	42
THE PRESENT STUDY . . . . .	46
Methodology . . . . .	46
Findings . . . . .	47
DISCUSSION . . . . .	50
REFERENCES . . . . .	57



## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

When television pioneers Philo Farnsworth, Vladimir Zworykin, and John L. Baird were working with their primitive television equipment during the early 1920s, they had no idea of the extent to which the medium would develop and be used in only a few decades. Early television was thought of as a device for transmitting criminal wanted posters or sending visual messages between business offices. Few, if any, of the people of that time period would have predicted that television would become the dominant electronic medium in a relatively brief period of time. As soon as World War II ended, the number of television receivers in use increased from 6,000 to 9,732,000 in only four years, and new broadcasting stations were opening all across the nation. During the 1950s, the number of television sets in use jumped 1200% from 4,000,000 to 53,000,000, and by 1970, this figure had risen to 88,000,000 (Fireman, 1977). Today, there are over 170,000,000 television sets in use in the United States (Challow, 1982).

When the television revolution began, most families were not fortunate enough to own a television set, so television watching was not a daily activity for most people. It was a special occasion that meant going to the home of a friend who owned a set or making a trip to the local bar or tavern. During this same time period, television watching grew to the extent that the set was on an average of 7 1/3 hours daily in the typical American household, and over 98% of homes



had a television set (Tooth, 1985). In many homes the set was run almost continuously.

Children below the age of 12 are a major consumer of television in the United States. The average child of kindergarten age spends an average of more than 30 hours per week in front of a television, and sees over 400 commercials. By the time this child has completed high school, he or she will have spent an average of 18,000 hours watching television, and will have spent only 12,000 hours in the classroom (Looner, 1971). The focus of this paper will be upon the programming and commercials aimed at children during Saturday morning by the three major American networks: NBC, CBS, and ABC.

The time slot of eight to noon on Saturday mornings is unique to all of television. During this relatively brief time period, the three major television networks direct an onslaught of programming and commercials at the 12 and below age group. The fact that some among this targeted audience have not yet gained the maturity and cognitive development to fully understand the persuasive impact of this "barrage" has led many parents, educators, and consumer groups to decry both the quality and the quantity of this Saturday morning "kiddie" period.

In the days before the television set was a standard fixture in the typical American household, advertisers usually had difficulty in reaching younger children with their messages. Salesmen were forbidden in the classroom and were usually met at the door by a protective parent. Magazine and comic book advertisements were generally too sophisticated to be understood by children below the age of 9 or



10. Radio was probably the best medium for selling to young pre-television children.

However, once television began entering American homes on a substantial scale, advertisers quickly realized that they now had a perfect way of reaching a vast new lucrative audience. The immense market of post-war babies was there to be exploited. This new generation would be growing up and would be demanding a huge amount of goods and services. The television set was a device easily operated by young children, and the messages they saw were colorful, exciting, and carefully written to create a demand for a vast array of products. Once exposed to these commercials, the child often became a surrogate salesman, using his or her powers of persuasion to convince a parent that certain products should be purchased. At the same time, parents often used the television set as a babysitter or pacifier, exposing the child to large amounts of advertising. At one time, the Federal Communications Commission allowed as much as 16 minutes of commercials per hour of programming during Saturday morning. This represented over 25% of all programming for that time period (Doolittle and Pepper, 1974).



## TELEVISION AS AN ADVERTISING MEDIUM

During the 1920s and most of the 1930s, television was primarily in the developmental and experimental stages. The number of people owning sets was extremely small, and there was very little to watch except for test patterns and an occasional musical or information program.

Broadcast television for the masses made its big debut at the 1939 New York World's Fair in New York City. It was hailed by its developers as the ultimate communications medium. Those already familiar with the persuasive impact of radio's audio signal would now be exposed to a potentially more exciting video signal as well. It was not long before television went commercial. In July of 1941, the National Broadcasting Company, holder of the first United States commercial television license, had signed nearly one dozen contracts for advertising. A limited number of stations on the east coast began regular broadcasting, and RCA, General Electric, Westinghouse, and other manufacturers began turning out hundreds of sets with five-inch and seven-inch screens.

However, the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese just five months later put American's broadcasting industry into neutral during the duration of the war. Work did continue on refining the technical quality of television broadcasts, but no more broadcast licenses were



issued, and all manufacturing plants were converted to wartime production. After the war ended, American television took a phenomenal leap forward, and the number of televisions in homes increased in geometric proportions.

During television's pioneering days of the late 1940s and early 1950s, virtually all television commercials were done live. During this era of broadcasting, Murphy's Law was demonstrated many times. The refrigerator door stuck, the coffee spilled, and the Timex watch strapped to the blades of an outboard motor could not be found to demonstrate that it could "take a licking and keep on ticking."

Advertisers were naturally embarrassed by the failures, and more of them began going to film during the early 1950s. Some began making their own commercials, but the majority began having their spots made by professional film companies. The first of these commercials were relatively simple and usually featured an announcer holding or demonstrating the product. Someone might be shown polishing a car, loading a dishwasher, or lighting up and enjoying a cigarette. Production gradually shifted to more location shooting, and small dramas and snappy musical numbers were popular. Special video effects entered soon afterward, and viewers of that era were treated to talking beer bottles, dancing packs of cigarettes, and Bufferin "B's" racing the other brand's "A's" out of a stomach.

The television commercial was becoming an art form in itself, and the industry soon had its own awards like film's "Oscar" and television's "Emmy." Popular slogans from television commercials were



heard in school classrooms, across bridge tables, and in the locker room at work. They were emblazoned on t-shirts, flaunted on campaign-style buttons, and flashed on auto bumper stickers. Likewise, commercial jingles became very popular, and a few such as the "Teaberry Shuffle" and "No Matter What Shape Your Stomach Is In" became big-selling records. In short, the television commercial was becoming a stronger and more persuasive selling tool. This was especially true of those commercials aimed at young children.

The television commercial makers took full advantage of special camera angles, quick shots, special lenses, slow motion, and other effects to give each spot strong visual impact. They sometimes did whatever they could to make the product appear better than it actually was. Before color television was introduced, coffee makers commonly poured dark red wine into their cups rather than coffee, because it had better visual impact. Makers of soup commercials filled the bottom of a bowl with clear marbles to make it appear that the soup contained more meat and vegetables.

Even though most commercials had gone to film, many children's shows still featured the program stars doing their own spots. Buffalo Bob Smith on "The Howdy Doody Show" extolled the virtues of Wonder Bread while body builder Dan Laurie lifted a barbell as he drank a glass of milk. For younger children watching these programs, it was difficult, if not impossible, to tell where the program ended and the commercial began.



One incident in particular brought this fact to the forefront in 1955. Dr. Frances Horwich, who was the hostess of "Ding Dong School," regularly did a vitamin pill spot in which she held the pills in her hand and told the audience how easy they were to take. New York Times columnist Jack Gould took note of this and condemned the practice in his column. Said Gould, "To put it mildly as possible, Dr. Horwich has gone a step too far in letting a commercial consideration jeopardize her responsibility to the young children whose faith and trust she solicits...using a child's credibility to club a parent into buying something is reprehensible under the best of circumstances, but in the case of a product bearing on a child's health, it's inexcusable" (Price, 1978). Since that time, both the selling of a product by the program host or character, and the selling of vitamins have been forbidden in programming directed primarily to children. However, the problem of host selling has again become an issue recently, and this will be discussed later in this paper. Due to increased public pressure, the National Association of Broadcasters revamped their guidelines, and many of the needed changes were made. These will also be discussed later in the paper.

Most research in the field of television advertising directed at children addresses these four basic concerns:

1. Advertising directed at children is basically harmful because it exploits the vulnerability and lack of sophistication common to younger children.



2. Children are exposed to commercials for products which are potentially hazardous if misused, mainly drugs and heavily-sugared foods.
3. Special advertising techniques may not be understood by young children, and may cause them to misinterpret the meaning of some commercials.
4. Long-term cumulative effects from exposure to commercials may have a negative effect on values, attitudes, and behavior habits of a child.



## THE BUSINESS OF ADVERTISING

In a paper dealing with television advertising, the business end of advertising should be examined, because virtually all of the television we see is dependent on revenue raised by advertising.

Television in America is big business, and children's television is a very lucrative part of that big business. Nearly one-quarter of network profits for the 1970-71 television season were generated by children's television programming (Choate, 1972). The programs are relatively inexpensive to produce, and the amount of advertising allowed on them has been very high. At one time, as many as 16 minutes of commercials were allowed during every hour of Saturday morning programming (Culley, Lazer, and Atkin, 1976). This amount was later reduced to 9½ minutes in 1976, but in 1984, the FCC lifted all restrictions on commercial time, letting the market set its own limit. The United States has far more advertising on children's television than any other country in the world. Of the 16 major non-Communist countries, only five allow any advertising during children's programs. England and Japan only allow five minutes of commercials for each hour of programming (Liebart, Neale, and Davidson, 1973).

Those who write, produce, and place their advertisements on television are experts in their respective fields. They know and



understand exactly which audiences they are going after. In his book, The Youth Market, Mel Heitzer recommends to always use a male announcer in your commercial. Children hear too much from Mom already. "Lots of slurpy sounds help. If you show kids, make them real - sloppy, not too neat. Use boys more than girls: boys won't buy what girls recommend, but girls will buy what boys recommend. Use animation; children believe in the Green Giant but not in pictures of real farmers. Keep the package on the screen and use the name a lot. Put Mom in the picture to suggest she approves and to make Mom think she will win the child's love by buying the product. Put in plenty of magic...make up new words and goofy situations. Advertising to kids should be fun. Let's keep it that way" (Price, 1978).

However, many critics do not view the situation as much fun. Many times the advertiser has entered the decision-making process and has altered or changed program content. On the program "The Courtship of Eddie's Father," breakfast scenes could not show the family eating bacon and eggs because one of the show's sponsors was a cereal company. Camel sponsored a show in the early 1950s called "Man Against Crime." No one was allowed to cough on the show, and villains were never allowed to be seen smoking a cigarette (Price, 1978).

It should be remembered that the television commercial is probably the most persuasive, the most seductive, and the most carefully thought out piece of video material that a young child will ever view. The child is shown a montage of fast-paced visual images highlighted by exciting music and a convincing sales pitch. The thirty-second salvos



promise fun, excitement, and popularity with one's peers. Then, suddenly, it is back to the show. The television commercial is coldly calculated, and is part of a carefully thought out advertising and marketing strategy. Every shot is planned with meticulous detail before the cameras roll. This is especially true with food commercials, where experts in the field literally place every flake in a bowl of cereal after searching through boxes and boxes to obtain only perfectly formed flakes. Elmer's glue is commonly used as a substitute for milk so the flakes will not become soggy. Compared with regular television entertainment, commercials have livelier graphics, better music, more lavish sets, and are very carefully edited.

Many countries have taken a more protective posture and have eliminated or severely limited children's television commercials. However, when Canada recently banned all advertising from children's programs on government-owned television, the advertisers simply shifted their advertising to family shows in the evening.

It should be noted that the company placing an advertisement is out to buy an audience, while it is the network's criteria which will be the controlling factor in shaping programs and placing them in an overall schedule. The game is both complicated and competitive.

The Saturday morning time slot is itself a consequence of this fact of life in television advertising. Children actually watch more television in other time slots. The networks simply determined that this type of programming offered the greatest potential for profit.



They know that targeting advertising at selected demographic groups is much more effective than aiming specialized advertising at random audiences. Naturally, advertisers wish to reach the largest number of potential customers with their messages, and the Saturday morning time period offers a very low "cost-per-thousand" ratio.



## GROUPS REGULATING CHILDREN'S ADVERTISING

Several groups play an important role in determining the content of programs and advertising directed at children. These groups come from the Federal government, the broadcasting industry, and from the private sector. Representatives from all three groups will be discussed in this paper.

### The Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

The Federal Communications Commission was formed by the Communications Act of 1934 and replaced the Federal Radio Commission, which was formed in 1926 at the request of radio broadcasters to regulate licensing of all stations and to assign broadcast frequencies and powers. Its power lies in its authority to revoke or prohibit the issuance of broadcast licenses. Overall, however, the FCC has done little to regulate programming or advertising. A look at its limitations will help to explain reasons for this.

First, the FCC is restricted from attempting to regulate program content by founding statutes of the Communications Act of 1934. It does this on a very limited scale by taking into account the amount of public service service programming done by an individual station. The FCC may also judge a station by its application of the Fairness Doctrine, which calls for the airing of the different views of all sides in a controversial issue.



### The Federal Trade Commission

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is involved with children's television advertising due to the nature of its authority to regulate all advertising. Thus, the FTC has regulatory power over all children's advertising regardless of the medium of placement. The FTC presides over cases involving false or deceptive advertising and does most of its work on individual cases. The FTC has no authority or jurisdiction over the programming directed at children.

### The 1978 Federal Trade Commission Hearings

In 1978, Congress held hearings which were prompted by recommendations from the Action for Children's Television and Center for Science in the Public Interest groups. The hearings began on January 15, 1979, in a courtroom in San Francisco and ran for six weeks. By the time the hearings had concluded, 220 witnesses had testified before the commission. In addition, another report had been prepared by the staff of the FTC's Division of Advertising Practices. The ACT and CSPI reports centered on the issue of commercials for sugared products, while the FTC staff report questioned whether any advertising directed to young children. The report proposed the following:

1. Ban all advertising for any product which is directed to, or seen by audiences composed of a significant proportion of children who are too young to understand the selling purpose of or otherwise comprehend or evaluate the advertising.



2. Ban all advertising for any product which is directed to or seen by audiences composed of a significant proportion of older children, the consumption of which poses the most serious dental health risks.
3. Require televised advertising for sugared food products not included in paragraph two which is directed to or seen by, audiences composed of a significant proportion of older children, to be balanced by nutritional and/or health disclosures funded by the advertisers (Adler, Lesser, Robertson, Rossiter, and Ward, 1980).

The FTC also wanted to consider four less drastic measures.

They were:

1. Affirmative disclosures located in the body of advertisements for highly cariogenic products directed to children.
2. Affirmative disclosures and nutritional information contained in separate advertisements funded by advertisers of highly cariogenic products advertised to children.
3. Limitations upon particular advertising messages used and/or techniques used to advertise to very young children, or to advertise highly cariogenic products to all children.



4. Limitations upon the number and frequency of advertisements directed at very young children, and limitations upon the number and frequency of all ads of highly cariogenic products directed at children (Adler, 1980).

The FTC also listed 15 general questions relevant to advertising aimed at children and asked for comment from any interested parties.

Questions were posed soon after the three main proposals were adopted. What exactly constitutes a children's program? Even though the Saturday morning period is usually thought of as the prime period for children's programming, would the "after school" period during weekday afternoons be included as well? Is there any link between the viewing of commercials during children's programming and subsequent dental and health problems? At what age can children begin to distinguish between regular programming and commercials, and at what age do they realize that the commercial is trying to sell them something? (Scheuer, 1979)

At this time, the chairman of the FTC was Michael Pertshuk, well-known as a consumer advocate. He had previously stated that his agency would be a vigorous advocate for the consumer. Chairman Pertschuk had been an outspoken critic of certain broadcast practices directed at children. However, it was this characteristic which led to his demise at the FTC.

On November 3, 1978, Pertschuk was forbidden from any further participation in his agency's proceedings on children's advertising



by district court judge Gerhard Gessell. The suit against Pertschuk was filed by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, The Toy Manufacturers of America, The Kellogg Company, and the Association of National Advertisers.

One key witness during the hearings was Leo Burnett, vice-president of the advertising agency which handles the Kellogg account. Said Burnett, "...children, like everyone else, must learn the marketplace...if a child is deceived by an ad at age four, what harm is done? He will grow out of it...even if, as many psychologists claim, a child perceives children in television commercials as friends, and not as actors selling them something, what's the harm? All the parent has to say is 'shut up or I'll belt you!'" (Scheuer, 1979).

Dr. Aimee Dorr, of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California, was one of the more prominent advocates of stronger measures to protect children. In her testimony before the commission, she stated, "It is horrible to think of children as targets, as the advertising industry does...the evidence is reasonably strong that the majority of children younger than seven do not understand the selling purpose of commercials" (Scheuer, 1979).

Although no direct action was taken as a result of the FTC hearings, some interesting alterations were proposed. Kenneth Mason, president of Quaker Oats, proposed that the three networks pool their resources and simulcast programming during a special "public-interest time period" from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. The emphasis would be



on programming of very high quality. Although the idea was endorsed by FCC chairman Charles Ferris, it was vigorously opposed by the three networks (Scheuer, 1979).

The most lasting outcome of these hearings would be the stiffened restrictions placed on member stations by the National Association of Broadcasters. There would be no banning of the advertising of sugary foods, but the general public became much more aware of the lack of nutrition in some of its more popular foods.

#### Action For Children's Television (ACT)

Probably the most involved citizen's group in television programming, Action For Children's Television, has been the most visible group working for better children's television since the late 1960s. The group was formed in 1967 in Newton Center, Massachusetts, and consisted of mothers who were concerned about the programming broadcast to their children. Their initial concern was the prevalence of violence in the programming itself, but the commercials in between did not go unnoticed.

One of ACT's first projects involved the monitoring of the program "Romper Room" during April and May of 1969. They found that the program was virtually one long commercial for its own toys and products. During a typical half-hour of "Romper Room," four and one-half minutes were devoted to "Romper Room" commercials, six minutes were spent playing with "Romper Room" toys that had just been advertised, and six more minutes were spent playing with other "Romper



Room" toys. ACT monitored one 45-minute segment in which the full time slot was devoted to the promotion of commercial products. Even the cookies and juice served on the show were promoted (Sarson, 1974).

The primary force behind ACT is Peggy Charren, a former housewife who became alarmed at the content of the television her children were watching. The initial 1967 meeting consisted of only four concerned mothers, but the group has grown considerably in size and in influence.

ACT now publishes a variety of literature on children's television, maintains a reference library, and runs a speaker's bureau. It annually gives "Achievement in Television" awards in recognition of creative improvements and innovations in children's programming.

ACT argues that advertising aimed at children is unethical because children are not prepared either emotionally or intellectually to properly evaluate the information in television's persuasive commercials. ACT also charges that the quality and diversity of children's television suffers because of the networks' desire to appeal to a mass audience for higher ratings.

The following are goals recommended by ACT president Charren to improve the overall climate of children's television:

1. Scheduling for diversity of viewer choice.
2. Airing of public service announcements to inform children about good nutrition to promote good health and to help children develop a positive self image.



3. Publicizing and recycling quality programs.
4. Developing programs for minority audiences and for children with special needs.
5. Encouraging the development of alternate technologies including videodisc and pay cable.
6. Eliminating of commercial abuses directed toward children (Scheuer, 1979).

While the major thrust of ACT's actions are directed at the major television networks and advertisers, they also strongly promote involvement by the parent in the selection and utilization of a child's television. ACT urges the parent to watch television with the child as much as possible and to exert a positive influence by explaining many of the confusing parts of television viewed by their children.

In 1974, the group began an intense lobbying campaign aimed at the FCC and protesting various aspects of advertising aimed at children. In 1973, the FCC logged only 34 consumer letters specifically complaining about children's television commercials. However, in 1974, over 100,000 were received, of which 90% concerned children's advertising (Scheuer, 1979). The ACT was the group orchestrating the campaign. ACT was very active in the 1978 FTC hearings as well, giving considerable amounts of testimony favoring the quality of children's television and the protection of children from various aspects of television advertising.



### The Center For Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)

This group, headed by researcher Robert Choate, has concentrated its efforts towards a reduction in the advertising of heavily sugared foods and in higher nutritional standards for all foods. During the FTC hearings, one of the most memorable pieces of testimony involved Choate's charge that the cardboard boxes of some cereals, when served with milk, contained more nutrition than the cereals inside. Partial victories were won in the subsequent reduction by the broadcasting industry in the quantity of commercials during children's television periods, and in the upgrading of nutritional supplements in many dry cereals.

### The National Association of Broadcasters

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) is made up of the major television networks, local affiliates, and independent broadcasters. However, all stations in the United States are not members, and consequently are not subscribers to its Code of Ethics. The NAB takes the position that commercials normally viewed by children can help facilitate the child's learning by informing him of the attributes of products and services available. They also feel that commercials tell a child much about our society and about the world in which he or she lives.

To avoid the possibility of adverse publicity from any exploitative advertising, the NAB established their Children's Television



Advertising Guidelines. The most recent version of these guidelines were issued in April of 1977. The code requires the following:

1. Documentation sufficient to back up all commercial claims.
2. Information on the characteristics and functional aspects of a product, including main ingredients and nutritional information. This must be presented in a straightforward manner.
3. A clear disclosure of a product's method of operation and source of power if applicable. A clear audio and video disclosure if batteries are needed for operation or are not included.
4. A disclosure if the product requires assembly (National Association of Broadcasters, 1976).

Among other things, the code forbids the following:

1. Sophisticated video techniques such as fast cuts and flashing psychedelic lighting effects which would over-glamorize a product.
2. The use of real-life authority figures/celebrities as product presenters or endorsements by such figures.
3. Any material which could be expected to scare or frighten a child.
4. Dramatization in a realistic war setting.
5. The use of "only" and "just" in connection with price.



Certain product categories have their own set of guidelines.

The following set applies to toys:

1. Toys shall be presented in a normal play environment.
2. Toys shall be shown on actual merit as a plaything with no exaggeration or distortion.
3. Audio disclosures should be presented during the final five seconds of the commercial.

These guidelines apply to premium offers:

1. Premium offers are limited to twenty seconds of a commercial or one-half, whichever is less.
2. The premium must be displayed clearly in a still visual presentation.
3. Any conditions attached to a "free" premium offer should be disclosed simultaneously in audio and video (National Association of Broadcasters, 1976).

In addition, food commercials must show breakfast foods within the framework of a balanced meal, and any relationship between food and energy provided must be documented and accurately depicted. For all programs designed for children under 12 years, commercials must be clearly separated from regular programming by a video and audio message. A typical message would say, "We will return to the Scooby Doo Show after these messages." Live actors and cartoon characters are forbidden from doing commercials within their own programs or directly adjacent to them.



The NAB also has rules governing the placement of commercials within a program. No more than four of what they call "non program" messages may be scheduled consecutively within programs and no more than three may be scheduled within station breaks.

The NAB codes were first challenged in 1979, when the U.S. Department of Justice filed an antitrust suit against the limitations on advertising placed in the codes. The first court case was held in 1982, and the NAB lost. Negotiations with the Department of Justice led to a withdrawal of the suit, and the NAB dissolved the codes in 1983 (Becker, 1983).

#### Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc.

The Council of Better Business Bureaus has a special division which is concerned with programming and commercials directed at children. The Children's Advertising Review Unit of the National Advertising Division (NAD) keeps an eye on all advertising on children's programming and has established a set of guidelines similar to those of the NAB. While these guidelines are less specific than those of the NAB, they do have the same stated goal - to assure that advertising aimed at children is truthful, accurate, and fair to the perceptions of children. The NAD code has five basic principles:

1. Advertisers should take into account the level of knowledge, sophistication, and maturity of their audience. This especially applies to younger children.



2. Advertisers should never exploit the naturally imaginative nature of children with unreasonable product claims or representations.
3. Since commercials are by nature educational, all information shall be as truthful and accurate as possible.
4. Commercials should stress such positive social virtues as kindness, generosity, and respect for others.
5. Since it is the parent who provides the primary force of social guidance to the child, advertisers should contribute to the parent-child relationship in a positive manner (Council of Better Business Bureaus, 1977).

The NAD code stresses positive social and moral values, close family relationships, respect for others, overall civility and good manners. It discourages negative stereotypes, poor use of language, and any implication that the use of a product will make the user more accepted by his or her peers.

The method of product presentation is also an important part of the NAD code. The presentation shall be made as clearly as possible, and all disclaimers should be clearly worded. Size claims such as "monster-sized" and "collosal" should be avoided. Any product demonstration made in the commercial should be one that the child should be able to do himself. All food products claims should encourage



sound nutritional practices. Any mealtime reference should show the product's part in a well-balanced diet. In reference to endorsements, no celebrities or program characters should be used to promote products, premiums, or services in or adjacent to the show in which the character appears, and all endorsements should reflect the real feelings of the endorser.

Since many young people lack the sophistication to accurately evaluate and compare two products, advertisers are encouraged to promote a product solely on its own merits. If comparisons are used, a clear difference must be demonstrated between the two products. Any use of price comparison should be understandable to the average child to whom the product is intended. Also, children should never be encouraged to ask the parent to purchase the product.

The NAD code is also concerned with safety. The product should never be shown being used in an unsafe manner. Medicine, drugs, and supplemental vitamins should not be advertised to children, and any claim which might be construed as literally true. When a premium is offered, the primary message should be product information and not a promotion for the premium.



## PRIOR RESEARCH

Numerous studies have been conducted which are concerned with television advertising and its effects on children. Several of them will be reviewed in the following section.

### Child Development Studies

The work of researchers in child development provides one way to better understand the way in which the young child perceives television commercials.

One of the foremost researchers in this field is Swiss social scientist Jean Piaget. According to his theory, a child's chronological age above all factors determines the way in which he or she perceives and reacts to the world. According to Piaget, as the child grows and develops, so do his cognitive powers. The world of the child is considerably different from the world of an adult, and the child needs development time before he can perceive things at different levels.

Piaget (1965) identified three stages of cognitive development. They are the Preconceptual Phase, the Intuitive Thought Phase, and the Concrete Operations Phase.

At the Preconceptual Phase, around two to five years of age, the child is especially vulnerable to what he sees on television.



His mind cannot differentiate between fantasy and reality. To the child at this stage of cognitive development, everything is real. People really can fly, and clouds can move by themselves.

The next stage of cognitive development is the Intuitive Thought Phase. This phase begins around the time a child enters the first grade and continues for two or three years. The child can now use reasoning with cognition, but he is still rather egocentric in his thinking and continues to see the world only as it relates to him. This group is extremely vulnerable to the manipulation of television commercials.

By the time a child becomes 11 or 12 years old, he enters the Concrete Operations Phase of cognition. The greatest changes occur during this phase. The egocentric view of the world has altered considerably. Once he realizes that points of view other than his exist, he can understand both the plot of a story and the motivation behind the onslaught of commercials.

Blatt, Spencer, and Ward (1972) conducted clinical interviews with kindergarten, second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade children which support the findings of Piaget. Kindergarten children, who would be placed in Piaget's Preconceptual Phase, had almost no understanding of the purpose of television commercials. This group also could not distinguish between the program and the commercial. Second-graders, who would be included in the Intuitive Thought Phase, clearly understood that commercials were intended to help sell products. Fourth- and sixth-graders, most of whom would be included in Piaget's



Concrete Operations Phase, were able to comment on various techniques used in the commercials. This study demonstrated the relationship between a child's chronological age and the understanding of the purpose of television commercials.

#### Parental Attitudes Towards Commercials

Parents should be considered a concerned party when it comes to the television commercials seen by their children. Even though the National Association of Broadcasters Code specifically forbids statements encouraging the child to ask a parent to purchase a product, it still remains a fact that the parent is involved in a majority of the purchases of items advertised on children's television.

Ward, Wackman, and Wartella (1976) surveyed 615 parents and asked them how they felt about advertising intended for children. Twenty-five percent had a strongly negative response, 23% were neutral, and only 4% indicated that they had a positive response to such advertising. Fifty percent of those surveyed had a negative response. Parents of kindergarten-aged children were most likely to be negative. Social class was not found to be a determining factor.

Feldman, Wolf, and Warmouth (1977) randomly selected 150 parents of children aged 2 to 12 and administered a questionnaire on children's advertising. Their findings included the following:



1. The average level of concern about children's commercials increases as "the heat of controversy might lead one to predict."
2. Sixty-five percent felt that some sort of regulation was needed; most preferred an independent citizen's group.
3. Only a small relationship was found between parental monitoring of children's television viewing and parental dissatisfaction with commercials.
4. Demographic characteristics could not be used as a predictor of parental concern.

Charles Atkin (1975a) surveyed 351 mothers of school-age children and found that 53% were opposed to the banning of commercials on Saturday morning television. Twenty-eight percent favored banning the commercials, while 19% did not know. Atkins found that less than half of the mothers could report having seen any Saturday morning commercials, and only 22% felt that they could cite a particular commercial that they felt was bad for their children. From the research, it would seem that, although a majority of parents have a negative opinion of children's television advertising, most would not favor eliminating it completely. The majority of parents did favor tougher controls, however.



### Television Advertising's Effect on Attitudes and Socialization

Television has been shown to be an important agent in socialization as a child grows and matures. Much of what he learns about society comes from exposure to television and commercials, and many studies have been done to measure the impact of television on socialization, attitudes, and beliefs.

Charles Atkin (1975b) conducted a study in which 500 elementary and preschool children were exposed to one of eight videotapes containing entertainment, news, and advertising while in groups of four. After viewing the tapes, half of the subjects were interviewed while the other half participated in product selection and play condition. Atkin was interested in how the children would respond to premium offers, medicine advertising disclaimers, learning from public service announcements, and commercials presented in clusters or singly. He found that learning and attention were strongly related to the subject's age. The effects of various treatments on learning and behavior were mixed and depended on the specific aspect of the program being tested.

Goldberg and Gorn (1978) conducted a study, published in 1978, in which they also examined the possible effects of television commercials on socialization. They wanted to determine the extent to which television commercials could lead child viewers to select material objects over more socially oriented subjects, possibly increase parent-child conflict, and lead to unhappiness in the child due to unfulfilled desires created by television commercials.



One hundred forty-four children were shown a picture of a familiar toy and were asked five questions. They were asked to choose between playing with the toy or with a close friend. Also, they were asked to choose between that toy and one chosen by a parent to measure interaction with parents. Children were also exposed to three levels of a commercial for the toy in a 10-minute program.

The commercials were found to have a significant effect on a child's performance for playing with the toy or with a friend. Commercial exposure was also shown to sway the opinion of the child in reference to the toy chosen by the parent. The child was also found to be more disappointed if the parent would not let the child have the toy if the child had seen the commercials compared to children who had not seen the commercials.

#### Product Requests

Several studies have been conducted to help determine any effects of television commercials on requests for products seen on the commercials.

Caron and Ward (1975) conducted a study for the purpose of determining the effects of the mass media on children's Christmas requests. Also measured was the parental input into the decision-making process. Published in 1975, the study involved 84 mother-child pairs from middle and upper-class Canadian families. The study involved letters written to Santa Claus. Later, children were asked where they had heard about the items they had requested. Both



age and class differences were found in the type of toys requested, but parental input was not effected by class. Older children cited television as their main source of information, while younger children indicated they had gotten most of their information by looking in stores.

A study published in 1976 by Galst and White (1976) looked at children's attentiveness to television and product requests. Forty-one mother-child pairs were used, and the children were ages four through six. The amount of child viewing was monitored by the parent as well as the number of times the child attempted to influence the mother to make a purchase on a monitored shopping trip. A positive relationship was found between television watching and the number of purchase requests made on a shopping trip. Older children were found to make more purchase requests than younger ones, but the age of the child was not a factor in the success of the requests.

Goldberg and Gorn (1975) conducted a study, published in 1974, in which they investigated the extent to which television commercials motivate children to attempt to obtain advertised products. The subjects were 133 Canadian boys aged 8 to 10 years. The boys were shown two new toys which were not yet on the market, and opinions of each were noted using a five-point scale. The subjects were divided into groups and were told that they could win the toy by solving a puzzle, (which was very difficult). Subjects were also shown a program featuring zero, one, and three commercials which featured one of the toys. Another bipolar scale was completed which measured



the boys' expectancy of obtaining the toy. The dependent measures were the time spent on the puzzle and the attitudinal data.

It was found that high expectancy of receiving a toy enhanced its value in relation to a moderate expectancy. Also, high expectancy subjects worked on the puzzles a significantly longer period of time than low expectancy subjects. The more commercials a subject saw, the longer he worked on the puzzle. Thus, commercial exposure to a toy and expectancy of receiving the toy influence the child's attitude toward one toy in comparison to another and will affect his behavior in obtaining it.

Goldberg, Gorn, and Gibson (1978) conducted a study which measured media effects on snack and breakfast food preferences. The study was published in 1978 and involved 122 California first-graders. They were exposed to seven different programs varying from a 24-minute cartoon show featuring nine minutes of commercials for sweetened products to a cartoon show featuring eight public service spots about good eating habits and nutrition. Children were then asked to choose from a group of several snack and breakfast foods. The type of show viewed had a significant effect on the choice of nutritious or non-nutritious foods. The children who ate the least junk food viewed a segment from "Fat Albert" which dealt with good nutrition and contained neither commercials or public service spots.

Liefeld (1974) conducted a study in which he looked at 30 mother-son pairs. The five-year-olds were divided into two groups. One group saw a set of cartoons with four commercials for each of



two cereals. The other group saw four commercials for each of two toys. After viewing, both groups were allowed to play with a group of seventeen toys, eight of which were viewed in the commercials. The children exhibited more interest in the toys seen in the commercials. Then, the groups went to a supermarket and began a shopping trip which was observed by experimenters. More requests were made for the cereals viewed in the commercials. The findings suggest that television advertising increases the approach behavior of subjects toward the advertised toys and cereals.

Robertson and Rossiter (1976) examined the extent to which children are capable of understanding the purpose of television commercials and the effects of that understanding on attitudes and purchase requests. The study involved 289 first-, third-, and fifth-grade students. Children were interviewed by trained graduate students using open-ended questions. They were questioned to see if they could distinguish commercials from regular programming. They were also asked if they understood the intent of the commercials. Parent-child interaction was measured as well. The study found that a positive relationship existed between age and recognition of commercial intent. Parent interaction was measured as well. The study found that a positive relationship existed between age and recognition of commercial intent. Parent interaction was also shown to be a positive factor in this. As perception of persuasive intent increased, children tended to like and trust the commercials less, and desire for the products decreased. Children who saw the



commercials as assistive trusted them more but did not necessarily express a desire for the product. The commercials were seen as more persuasive than assistive by a majority of the students.

Robertson and Rossiter (1974) did another study in a naturalistic setting in which they investigated the effects of television advertising on children's toy and game choices. Two hundred eighty-nine first-, third-, and fifth-grade boys were studied and were asked to indicate their five most preferred Christmas presents over two time periods: Five weeks before Christmas and one week before Christmas. Children were also asked to indicate where they had heard of each item. These results were compared to television commercials aired during the respective time periods. The study indicated a moderate shift from gifts such as sports equipment, leisure, and educational gifts to toys and games. This corresponded with an increase in toy and game advertising during the same time period.

Bever, Smith, Bengen, and Johnson (1975) examined trends in children's attitudes toward advertising during ages 5 through 12. In this study, published in 1975, students were interviewed about morality, fantasy, economics, and television commercials. Their findings indicated that the children's attitude toward television definitely changed as they grew older. As they grew older, they became less trusting of television and became more cynical. This was especially true in regards to their comprehension of the motives behind television advertising.



Howard, Hulbert, and Lehman (no date) interviewed 96 children, aged two to six years, along with their mothers. In this unpublished study, children almost never mentioned television as the reason for buying toys and cereals, but the children did see television as their most important source of information about new toys and cereals. Mothers felt that their children could distinguish between program and commercial, but all other research has shown otherwise.

Duesere (1976) discovered that a positive relationship existed between viewing of television and the consumption of heavily sugared cereal, candy, snack food, and empty-calorie food.

### Content Analyses

Numerous studies have analyzed the content of various aspects of children's television advertising.

F. E. Barcus, working with Action For Children's Television, studied 466 Saturday morning commercials in Boston during 1971. The racial makeup was found to be 73% white only, 24% racially mixed, and 3% minority only. Forty-nine percent of the commercials featured males only, while 16% used females only. Thirty-five percent of the commercials included both sexes.

Twenty-four percent of the commercials in Barcus' study were for cereals, 22% featured toys, and the same percentage featured other foods and snacks. Twenty percent of the commercials were for candy and sweets. Barcus found that the commercials designed for



boys centered around size, power, noise, and speed, while girls' commercials centered around beauty and popularity.

R. B. Choate (1972) found that 50% of children's commercials were for food, 10% featured vitamins (now forbidden) and 30% were for toys. Choate found very few commercials for any nutritious foods.

Doolittle and Pepper (1974) conducted a content analysis of children's commercials and found that 40% were for breakfast food, 18% were for candy and gum, and snacks made up 12% of the commercials. What he called "meal food" constituted 7%, as did toys. Other products made up 8% of the commercials. They also analyzed role status and found that children played a major role in 61% of the commercials versus only 4% for teens. Adults played a major role in 54% of the spots, and minority adults played a major part in 27% of them. Males were found to have a dominant role in 88% of the commercials versus 12% for females. They also found anthropomorphic characters, such as animated monsters and talking toasters, in over 50% of the commercials analyzed.

Chuzmir, Winick, Williamson, and Winick (1973) primarily studied food commercials and divided them as follows: snacks and desserts 22%, cereals 20%, candy 16%, drinks 16%, and other foods and restaurants 26%. In their study, animation was used in over 50% of the commercials, while slogans were employed in over 60%. They also found that 15.3% of the commercials contained no product information, 51.3% have some information, 31.4% contain much, while 2.1% of the commercials contain very much information.



### A New and Alarming Trend

The Reagan administration came to power in Washington in January of 1981 promising to eliminate much of the regulatory powers of the various government agencies. The administration's philosophy of a free market system was clearly evident in the Federal Communications Commission and its new chairman, Mark S. Fowler. Mr. Fowler once defined his role as FCC commissioner as "pruning, chopping, slashing, eliminating, burning, and deep-sixing" 50 years of regulation (Wilke, 1985).

One of the FCC's first changes effecting television was the dropping of time limits on the number of commercials allowed per hour. At the time of this writing, no significant increase has occurred, but this area should be closely monitored.

Other FCC decisions relaxed rules which required television stations to air informative and educational children's programs in addition to its normal entertainment fare, and allowed the introduction of what will be called "program length commercials." This trend involves an entire show built around a toy currently on the market. Since March of 1983, the number of toy-based shows has risen from 14 to 40 (Wilke, Therrien, and Dunkin, 1985). Such programs as the "Care Bears," "Strawberry Shortcake," and "He-man" are little more than dynamic, 30-minute commercials for their various companies.

A good example of this marketing trend can be seen in the cartoon series "Masters of the Universe." It first began, not as a cartoon show, but as a series of action-figure toys. Later, in a



joint effort with Filmmation Studios, a television show was created based on the line of toys. The success of this joint effort has been considerable, with Mattel's "Masters of the Universe" line of toys registering one-half billion dollars in sales for 1984. Another toy line called "The Transformers" was incorporated into a cartoon series and enjoyed \$100 million in sales during its first year of introduction, making it the most successful introduction of a toy series ever (Wilke, Therrien, and Dunkin, 1985).

A step even further in the development of this trend involves a new action series called "Thundercats." This series, developed by Telepictures, Inc., involves a licensing arrangement with a local station who will share in the future profits from the program and from sales of the toys and other licensed products. Development and production costs for the "Thundercats" project are estimated to be \$20 million, and several television stations have reportedly signed licensing agreements (Wilke, Therrien, and Dunkin, 1985).

In spite of a strong lobbying effort by Action for Children's Television and other groups to halt the trend to toy-based programs, the FCC rejected their petitions on April 11, 1985. Fowler stated that, "Freedom of speech is far more important than having three more hours of government-mandated children's programming" (Wilke, 1985).

Even the food industry is looking at the possibilities of this type of television marketing. One of the new programs during the Fall of 1985 is based around the candy "Gummi Bears." Columnist



Ellen Goodman noted sarcastically that the animated bears travel around the world fighting all sorts of evil "except cavities" (Goodman, 1985).



## THE ATKIN-HEALD STUDY

Christopher Atkin and Gerald Heald (1977) conducted a two-year study during the fall of 1972 and 1973. The purpose of the study was to analyze the content of toy and food commercials aired by the three major American television networks during Saturday morning from 8 a.m. until noon. The two mornings selected were November 11, 1972, and November 10, 1973. At this time, the pre-Christmas toy promotions were just beginning, and they were the major variety of commercial found in the study. Of the 463 commercials analyzed, 58.3% were toy commercials, while 41.7% of the commercials promoted products.

The Atkin-Heald study included the following areas which were analyzed:

1. The Number of Characters
2. The Age of Characters
3. The Race of Characters
4. The Product Display Technique
5. The Medium of Presentation
6. The Use of Slogans or Jingles
7. The Mention of Brand Names

Their specific findings will be discussed later in this paper. However, these general trends were found.



Food advertisements tended to have more characters than toy advertisements. Forty-six percent of food commercials featured five or more characters compared with only 11% for toy ads. Toy advertisements featuring only one or two characters appeared three times as often. Regarding the age of the characters in the commercials, the typical food commercial showed children and adults together, while the majority of toy commercials featured children playing without adult supervision.

The racial makeup was generally all white. Minorities were rarely ever shown without the presence of at least some whites. A small percentage of all categories featured anthropomorphic/fantasy figures such as clowns, animated animals, and talking toasters. For display purposes, the actual product was used most of the time. This was true 99% of the time in toy commercials, but about one-fourth of the food commercials featured pictures or drawings. Virtually all of the toy commercials used the film medium, while food commercials used considerably more animation, with 62% of the commercials using at least some animation.

More than a decade had passed since this study was completed, and much has changed in the broadcast industry. Cable television has made considerable inroads into American homes since 1973, giving many children much more to choose from in the way of programming. The major television networks no longer exercise a virtual monopoly on the Saturday morning audience. In addition, electronic advances such as home computers, video games, video disc players, home



satellite dishes, and video tape recorders have given home viewers a myriad of new choices.

The nature of programming has also changed since the Atkin-Heald study. When their study was conducted, many of the Saturday morning programs featured live actors. In the present study, only one program, the 30-minute "Pryor's Place" starring Richard Pryor, featured any live actors. The remaining 11½ hours of programming was entirely animated. This aspect will be discussed later in this paper.

In light of the many varied and sizeable changes that have taken place in this field since the Atkin-Heald studies were conducted, it can be assumed that the broadcasting and advertising industries would have made changes in response to new situations they would be facing. High inflation has been an economic factor strongly effecting our country since the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 and subsequent oil embargo. Certainly the broadcasting and advertising industries were effected by high inflation, and this should be reflected in some aspects of television commercials as stations and advertisers modified or changed production techniques or cut corners to reduce costs.

Minorities in America have realized considerable gains and advances in many areas of our society since Atkin and Heald conducted their studies. This was especially true in the areas of government and politics, as minorities moved to consolidate their power in many areas of our country. Affirmative action hiring and advancement policies have helped to further integrate minorities into our



society. We should find an increase in minority representation in television commercials since the Atkin-Heald studies were completed.

A new innovation in the field of television production is the use of computers to generate high-quality visual graphics and displays. They are commonly used in network promos and in commercials aired in prime time television. The imaginative and colorful nature of computer-generated graphics would be a strong addition to this type of commercial, and some should be evident in the present study.

Specifically, the study will hypothesize:

1. The number of characters in the commercials will be reduced.
2. There will be no change in the age of characters in the toy and food commercials.
3. The number of minorities represented in the commercials will increase.
4. The method of product presentation will change.
5. The medium of presentation will change, i.e., there will be more innovative technology used, such as computer-generated graphics.
6. There will be a change in the number and use of jingles.
7. There will be a change in the number of times the product name is mentioned in the commercial.



## THE PRESENT STUDY

### Methodology

The commercials in this study were videotaped on Saturday, October 13, 1984, during the hours of 8 a.m. and noon on the three major television networks: NBC, CBS, and ABC. The resulting data were then compared to that of the Atkin-Heald studies using the same categories. Since nominal data was used to compare the two sets of figures, Chi-square analysis was used.

Each presentation of a commercial was weighted on an equal basis. That is, if the same version of a commercial was aired eight times, it was counted as eight separate commercials. Each category's percentage of the total for toy and food commercials will be used to describe the distribution of the findings.

Human characters appearing in the commercials were described by age and race. Actors in teenage roles were counted as children. In the racial category, any non-white was counted as a minority. This would include Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and American Indians. The category "No Human Characters" included clowns, puppets, animated figures, talking animals, and talking inanimate objects such as toasters. The category "Method of Presentation" measure whether the actual product or a picture or illustration was used. The use of the two mediums, film and animation, was also compared.



The brand name of a product is usually mentioned at various times in a commercial. The number of times a brand name was mentioned was noted, along with whether or not slogans or jingles were used.

### Findings

The first category was the number of characters in the commercial. No significant change was found in the number of characters in toy commercials, but in food commercials, the number of characters was significantly smaller in 1984 ( $\chi^2=26.36$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The number of food commercials featuring three or less characters went from 35% in the previous study to 54% in the 1984 study. The first hypothesis is supported in the toy category, but is rejected in the food category.

Both toy and food commercials showed significant changes in the age of characters found in the commercials. In toy commercials, a trend was found in an increase in the number of adults in the commercials ( $\chi^2=11.80$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Commercials featuring adults increased from 13% to 21%. A stronger trend was found in toy commercials featuring children only ( $\chi^2=26.26$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Atkin and Heald found that 28% of the food commercials in their study featured children only, while 51% were found in the 1984 study. The second hypothesis is rejected.

No change was found in the racial composition of the commercials. Both studies found that 87% of the toy commercials featured whites only, while the figures for food commercials were 62% in the previous



study and 63% in the 1984 study. The figures for commercials featuring a combination of white and minority actors were almost as close. Both studies found that 12% of the toy commercials featured whites and minorities, while in the food category, Atkin and Heald found 30%, while in the 1984 study, 32% were found. The third hypothesis is rejected.

No significant change was found in the method of presentation of toy commercials, but in the food category, significant changes were found ( $\chi^2=15.00$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The use of a combination of picture and the actual product increased from 3% to 8%. The use of a picture or illustration only decreased from 24% to 12%. The fourth hypothesis is rejected for the toy category, but is supported for the food category.

The largest change in the study was found in the medium used in the commercials. The percentage of toy commercials using both film and animation increased from 1% to 23%, while the use of film only decreased from 99% in the previous study to 77% in the 1984 study ( $\chi^2=492.88$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). A smaller, but still significant change was found in the food commercials ( $\chi^2=30.85$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The use of film increased from 38% to 63%, while the use of animation in food commercials decreased from 27% to 8%. The fifth hypothesis is supported

Both food and toy commercials showed a significant increase in the use of slogans or jingles. Toy commercials went from 39% to 60% ( $\chi^2=18.54$ ,  $p<.001$ ), while food commercials' use of jingles



increased from 48% to 65% ( $\chi^2=17.67$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The sixth hypothesis is rejected. A significant increase was also found in the number of times the brand name is mentioned. This was true for both toy ( $\chi^2=41.32$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and food commercials ( $\chi^2=43.41$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The seventh hypothesis is rejected.



## DISCUSSION

During the past decade, the broadcasting industry has witnessed many changes and transformations. New technologies have changed many facets of the industry including the distribution of television signals, the new competitors that have entered the marketplace, the new methods of generating special effects and production techniques, and the tremendous advances in consumer electronics. At the same time, costs of producing programs have increased considerably since the Atkin-Heald study was conducted. Many of these changes will have an effect on the advertising and programming seen on Saturday morning television. Significant changes were found in several categories.

Food commercials were found to have significantly smaller casts. One explanation could be that casts were reduced simply for economic reasons in response to rising costs and more lucrative royalties contracts. At the same time, research may have found that smaller cast commercials were more effective sellers.

While both toy and food commercials showed significant changes in the ages of characters in the commercials, the largest change was in food commercials, which showed a large increase in the use of children. Economic factors do not seem to enter in here. One possible explanation could be in the large increase in the number



of franchised fast-food operations in the country during this time period. They relied heavily on television advertising, and directed a large amount of their commercials at the youth market.

The most surprising finding in the study was the fact that the racial makeup of commercials in the present study remained virtually the same. This would seem contrary to the fact that minorities have made such considerable gains in our society in the past decade. This would most certainly be an area for further investigation. Was this merely a coincidence, and would a content analysis done the following week find any differences? Would similar comparisons in prime time yield any significant changes? Have minorities increased in their representation on television programs during the same period? The findings of this study would certainly give researchers in matters of minority representation justification for further study.

The largest change was in the use of a combination of film and animation in toy commercials. The typical commercial which used this format featured a toy which was directly linked to a character in a program. The commercial usually began with a short animated segment featuring the toy personality as it would be seen in a cartoon show. This animated segment then faded into a filmed segment featuring two or three children playing with the actual toy. The spot usually ended with a shot of the toy along with an adult voice giving purchase details and disclaimers.



This type of commercial is especially powerful, because it is difficult to distinguish from regular programming. This would be especially true for younger children. As we see the number of programs built around a toy product increasing, we will probably find an increase in this type of commercial.

The increased use of animation was also evident in the programming itself. Of the 12 hours of programming viewed in this study, slightly more than 4% featured live actors. The remainder of the programs were entirely animated. Slightly over 14% of the programs in the Atkin-Heald study featured actors either on tape or film. Regrettably, today's Saturday morning audience has few real people to relate to. Economics is probably the most important underlying factor in the shift to animation. Due to rising costs relating to royalties for actors, more and more programs are done with animation. The networks have found that animated shows can be rebroadcast five to six times before audiences tire of them, and royalties for an animated program are only about 20% of the cost of making a new program (Scheuer 1979).

Food commercials showed a significant increase in the use of film for production. The number of totally animated food commercials took a large and significant drop. A partial explanation could be the continued growth of advertising for fast food chains. This genre of commercial tends to be all film in format.



Both toy and food commercials showed a significant increase in the use of slogans and jingles. The use of continued repetition of slogans and jingles is an effective way to get young children to remember a brand name or product. This was probably a factor in the category of brand name repetition which also showed significant increases in both categories.

No use of computer-generated graphics was evident in the present study. This may be due to the fact that conventional animation is still less expensive. However, as the unit cost of computer use continues to drop, we should see the use of this form of animation in the future. Computer animation is already being used in some feature film sequences.

There can be little doubt that television plays a major role in shaping the personalities and molding the attitudes and beliefs of our young children as they undergo the rigorous and complicated process of socialization. A large part of what that child has learned both in general knowledge and in expected social behavior has come from his exposure to television.

There can be little doubt that, after parents, television has become the most potent influence on his values, mores, beliefs, and attitudes. Much of the time spent in front of the television set had been taken from other activities such as reading, outdoor play, and exercise. He often sees more violence in one night on television than many of us see in a lifetime.



It would be unreasonable to suggest that television alone is responsible for everything that is wrong with children today. Permissiveness in the home and in the school, the dispersion of the extended family, confusion over moral standards, and the erosion of traditional institutions all help explain why children behave as they do. Any aspect of child behavior is enormously complex, especially when measuring cause and effect.

However, there can be little doubt that young children deserve a special amount of protection from the onslaught of carefully planned, but often deceptive television commercials they see during Saturday morning and other viewing periods as well. It must be remembered that this is a special audience, and it should be treated with special consideration by the various government agencies which regulate broadcasting and by the various entities in the private sector that have influence and input concerning the television watched by this vulnerable and impressive group. In addition, viewing of television has been connected to higher consumption of heavily-sugared foods and the development of poor eating habits. Previous research has found a connection between the viewing of television commercials and dissent within the family, due to increased demand for advertised products.

Much of the criticism aimed at television and commercials is certainly justified. Commercials present a picture of contemporary life that is often unrealistic. They use sophisticated sales techniques that are often not fully understood by young children,



and rely heavily on a world of fantasy and overstatement. They encourage the child to become materialistic.

This study revealed several significant changes in children's television advertising that have occurred in the past decade. Some were more than likely attributable to certain causal factors, but others are not as easily explained. The fact that minority groups have virtually the same representation that they had in 1972-73 is very difficult to explain, especially since these groups have made such considerable gains in other areas of our society. Researchers in this field should consider a replication to determine if these racial quotas are indeed "locked in."

The large number of toy-based programs should be carefully scrutinized by governmental regulatory agencies and by private individuals alike. Since the FCC will apparently do very little to interfere in this area during the Reagan administration, it should be the responsibility of private groups and media researchers to keep a close watch on children's television and keep the public informed of their findings. The success of existing toy-based programs will, more than likely, cause others to enter their own programs.

With no restrictions on the amount of commercial time allowed on Saturday mornings, networks could nearly saturate the Saturday morning airwaves with thirty-minute commercials disguised as programs. Researchers in the fields of mass media and child



behavior should remain vigilant and should do as much as they can to closely monitor this area of television that effects such a valuable but vulnerable part of our society.



## REFERENCES

- ① Adler, R., Lesser, G. S., Robertson, T. S., Rossiter, J. R., & Ward, S. (1980). The effects of television advertising on children. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.
- Appell, C. (1963). Television viewing and the preschool child. Marriage and Family Living, 12.
- Atkin, C. (1975a). Effects of television advertising on children: Survey of mother's responses to television commercials. Technical Report, Michigan State University, Ann Arbor.
- Atkin, C. (1975b). Effects of television advertising on children-first year experimental evidence. (Report #1). Michigan State University, Advertising and Children Project.
- Atkin, C. (1975c). Effects of television advertising on children-second year experiment evidence. (Report #2). Michigan State University, Advertising and Children Project.
- Atkin, C. (1975d). Effects of television advertising on children-survey of pre-adolescent's responses to television commercials. (Report #6). Michigan State University, Advertising and Children project.
- Atkin, C., & Heald, G. (1977). The content of children's toy and food commercials. Journal of Communications, 27, 107-144.
- Barcus, F. E., & Laughlin, L. (1978). Food advertising on children's television: An analysis of appeals and nutritional content. Action for Children's Television, Newtonville, Massachusetts.
- Barcus, F. E. (1971). Saturday children's television: A report of television programming and advertising on Boston commercial television. Unpublished monograph. Action for Children's Television, Newtonville, Massachusetts.
- Barol, B., Bailey, E., & Zabarsky, M. (1984). Tuning in on kiddie videos. Newsweek, June 25.
- Becker, S. (1983). Discovering mass communication. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman Company.



- 2 Bever, T. G., Smith, M. L., & Johnson, T. G. (1975). Young viewer's troubling responses to tv ads. Harvard Business Review, 53, 119-121.
- Blatt, J., Spencer, L., & Ward, S. (1972). A cognitive developmental study of children's reactions to television advertising. In Eli Rubenstein (ed.). Television and social behavior, 4, pp. 452-467. U.S. government printing office: Washington.
- 3 Caron, A., & Ward, S. (1975). Gift decisions by kids and parents. Journal of Advertising Research, 15, 12-50.
- 4 Challow, T. (1977). The television explosion. Nova television special, WGBH, Boston.
- Choate, R. B. (1971). Researchers air views on kids' ads. Advertising Age, 86-87.
- Choate, R. B. (1972). The sugar-coated children's hour. The Nation, 47.
- Chuzmir, S., Winick, C., & Williamson, L. (1973). Children's Television commercials. New York: Praeger.
- Cole, B. (1981). Television today: A closeup view. New York: Oxford.
- Comstock, G., Chaffee, S., Katzman, N., McCombs, M., & Roberts, D. (1978). Television and human behavior. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Council of Better Business Bureaus National Advertising Division. (1977). Children's advertising guidelines. Council of Better Business Bureau: Washington.
- Culley, J., Lazer, W., & Atkin, C. (1976). The experts look at children's television. Journal of Broadcasting, 20, 3-21.
- Desmond, R., & Jeffries-Fox, S. (1983). Awareness of television advertising: The effects of a critical viewing program. Communications Education, 23, 23-28.
- Doolittle, J., & Pepper, R. (1975). Children's tv ad content: 1974. Journal of Broadcasting, 19, 131-142.
- Duesere, S. (1976). The effects of television advertising on children's eating habits. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



Feldman, S., & Wolf, A. (1974). What's wrong with children's commercials? Journal of Advertising Research, 14, 39-43.

Feldman, S., Wolf, A., & Warmouth, D. (1977). Parental concern over child-directed commercials. Journal of Communications, 27, 125-137.

Fireman, J. (1977). TV book, New York: Workman.

5 Galst, J., & White, M. (1976). The unfriendly persuader: The reinforcing value of television and children's purchase - influence attempts at the supermarket. Child Development, 47, 1089-1096.

Geis, M. L. (1982). The language of television advertising, New York: Academic Press.

6 Goldberg, M., & Gorn, G. (1974). Children's reactions to television advertising - an experimental approach. Journal of Consumer Research, 1, 69-75.

Goldberg, M., & Gorn, G. (1978). Some unintended consequences of tv advertising to children. Journal of Consumer Research, 5, 22-29.

7 Goldberg, M., Gorn, G., & Gibson, W. (1978). TV messages for snack and breakfast foods: Do they influence children's preferences? Journal of Consumer Research, 5, 73-81.

Goodman, E. (1985). Kid vid a toy fair. Daytona Beach News Journal, 27.

Gussow, J. (1974). Counternutritional messages of tv ads aimed at children. Journal of Consumer Research, 4, 48-52.

Harris, J. (1980). TV guide: The first 25 years. New York: Triangle Publications.

8 Howard, J., & Hulbert, J. (1973). Advertising and public interest. Federal Trade Commission: Washington.

Lewis, C., & Lewis, M. (1974). The impact of television commercials on health-related beliefs and behaviors in children. Pediatrics, 53, 431-435.

Liebert, D., Sprafkin, J., & Rubenstein, E. (1977). Effects of television commercial disclaimers on the product expectations of children. Journal of Communications, 27, 118-124.



- Liebert, R., Neale, J., & Davidson, K. (1973). The early window: Effects of television on children and youth. New York: Pergamon.
- 9 Liefeld, J. (1974). Television advertising and children: An experimental study. Unpublished working paper. University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada.
- Looney, G. (1971). The ecology of childhood. In E. Sarson (ed.). Action for children's television. New York: Avon.
- Melody, W., & Erlich, W. (1974). Children's tv commercials: The vanishing options. Journal of Communications, 24, 113-125.
- Milavsky, J., Perowsky, B., & Stipp, H. (1975). TV drug advertising and proprietary and illicit drug use among teenage boys. Public Opinion Quarterly, 39, 457-481.
- National Association of Broadcasters. (1976). Advertising guidelines: Children's tv advertising. National Association of Broadcasters: New York.
- Piaget, J. (1965). The child's conception of the world. Tatawa, New Jersey: Littlefield Adams and Company.
- Price, J. (1978). The best thing on tv, commercials. New York: Viking Press.
- 10 Robertson, T., & Rossiter, J. (1974). Children and commercial persuasion: An attribution theory analysis. Journal of Consumer Research, 1, 13-20.
- 11 Robertson, T., & Rossiter, J. (1976). Short-run advertising effects on children: A field study. Journal of Marketing Research, 13, 68-70.
- Robertson, T., & Rossiter, J. (1977). Children's response to commercials. Journal of Communications, 27, 101-106.
- Rossiter, J., & Robertson, T. (1974). Children's tv commercials: Testing the defense. Journal of Communications, 24, 137-145.
- Rossiter, J., & Robertson, T. (1975). Children's television viewing: An examination of parent-child consensus. Sociometry, 67-70.
- Rubin, A. (1977). Television usage, attitudes, and viewing behaviors of children and adolescents. Journal of Broadcasting, 22, 147-153.



- Rubin, D. (1972). An exploratory investigation of children's responses to commercial content of television advertising in relation to their stages of cognitive development. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.
- Sarson, E. (1974). Growing grass roots in viewerland. Journal of Broadcasting, 16.
- Scheuer, S. (1979). TV, the television annual, 1978-79. New York: Collier. of research. Journal of Communications, 24, 126-136.
- Sheikh, A., Prasad, V., & Rao, T. (1974). Children's tv commercials: A review of research. Journal of Communications, 24, 126-136.
- Sheikh, A., & Moleski, M. (1977). Conflict in the family over commercials. Journal of Communications, 27, 152-157.
- Shimp, T., Dyer, R., & Divita, S. (1976). An experimental test of harmful effects of premium-oriented commercials on children. Journal of Consumer Research, 3, 1-11.
- Singer, D., & Singer, J. (1981). Television and developing imagination of the child. Journal of Broadcasting, 44, 87-98.
- Singer, D., & Singer, J. (1981). Teaching television. New York: Dial Press.
- Streicher, L., & Bonney, N. (1973). Children talk about television. Paper presented to Eastern Sociological Society.
- Tooth, G. (1985). Why children's television turns off so many parents. U.S. News & World Report.
- Ward, S. (1972). Effects of television advertising on children and adolescents, in E. Rubenstein, G. Comstock, and J. Murray (eds.). Television and Social Behavior, 4. U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington.
- Ward, S., & Wachman, D. (1971). Family and media influences on adolescent consumer learning. American Behavioral Scientist, 14, 415-427.
- Ward, S., & Wachman, D. (1973). Children's information processing of television advertising. In P. Clarke (ed.). New models for mass communications research. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, pp. 119-146.



Ward, S., Wachman, D., & Wartella, E. (1976). How children learn to buy: The development of consumer information and processing skills. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Waters, H. (1977). What tv does to kids. Newsweek, 47.

Wilke, J. (1985). Has the FCC gone too far? Business Week, p. 48.

Wilke, J., Therrien, L., & Dunkin, A. (1985). Are the programs your kids watch simply commercials? Business Week, p. 53.

Winick, C., Williamson, L., Chuzmir, S., & Winick, M. (1973). Children's television commercials. New York: Praeger.